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ABSTRACT

Additional support for foreign language learning needs to be given to those students who have special qualities and academic abilities. The linguistically talented student should be encouraged to begin foreign language study at an early age and to study a second foreign language after achieving a degree of proficiency in the first. Schools should provide language offerings other than the traditional western European languages. Gifted students typically display specific traits which consequently require specific needs to be satisfied in the foreign language classroom or program. Among these are language traits requiring discussion with intellectual peers, appropriate reading materials, creative writing, and strengthening of research skills. Conceptualization traits require divergent open-ended teaching strategies, minimal use of rote drill, an atmosphere of valuing uniqueness, and self directed discovery. Socialization traits require opportunities to assume various roles in group interaction, increased exposure to people of varied backgrounds, provisions for understanding self and heightened sensitivity to others, and acceptance of nonconformity. Productivity traits require varied and individual opportunities and physical and intellectual needs in learning activities and sharpening of technical, research, and communication skills. The appendix includes descriptions of programs throughout the U.S. for the gifted student. (JK)

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THE ROLE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR THE GIFTED AND TALENTED STUDENT

A Position Paper

National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages

Duane Jackson, President

Prepared Under Direction of The Council

by

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March 1982

INTRODUCTION

The United States is the only developed nation in the world today which has not provided or required foreign language education for all of its children who are capable of pursuing an academic education. The lack of Americans' competence in foreign languages was recently documented by the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies which pointed out in its report to the President that our inability to communicate with other nations in their language is shameful, uneconomical, scandalous and downright dangerous.[1] This becomes an even greater cause for concern when one considers that this lack of educational opportunity may affect those who would need it the most: the gifted students. They will assume the leadership roles in our nation's business, governmental, and educational sectors. There is also concern when one considers the unique needs of gifted students to allow them to broaden their educational experience by providing them with opportunities for personal enrichment and satisfaction.

It should, however, be emphasized that this position on foreign language education for the gifted in no way diminishes the emphasis on the strong premise that the study of foreign languages should be available to all students, but rather the concern here is to provide additional support for foreign language learning to those students who have special qualities and academic abilities and who will undoubtedly be the future leaders in an ever increasing interdependent world.

THE LINGUISTICALLY GIFTED STUDENT

Who are the linguistically gifted students and how can they be identified? It has been pointed out by Gordon[2] that the gifted and talented "are usually associated only with talents in science, mathematics, native language communication and the arts; and they are defined as having I.Q.'s of 120 or above, being in the upper 3-5 percent of the student population and scoring in the 500-600's in the SAT's." Gordon, however, adds that the successful second language learner has an additional set of characteristics as was found by research conducted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in 1975:

1. Field independence - the students' facility in separating information from noise, that is, selecting appropriate linguistic stimuli while ignoring inappropriate ones.

2. Ambiguity tolerance - the learner's ability to cope better with the new, the different, the paradoxical in a given task.

3. Balanced generalization - the ability of good second language learners to classify linguistic data in neither too wide nor too narrow a manner. Good language learners use the target language as a separate reference system independent of the native language.

4. Extroversion - students who are successful in oral fluency in the target language usually possess a degree of aggressiveness and daring.

5. Good language learners know something about their learning style. Regardless of the teacher's style or the style of the materials, the learners can integrate things into their own cognitive styles.

6. Successful language learners feel comfortable taking risks, and they do so often. They are willing to place themselves in situations where they might feel silly in order to communicate their intentions by any means within their power.

7. A successful language learner actively seeks arenas in which to use the target languages.

8. They are excellent guessers. They manipulate linguistic clues to form hypotheses or guesses, which are then tested and evaluated.

9. Successful language learners pay attention to form as well as meaning. They consciously want to know about underlying patterns and rulegoverned relationships. They are excellent monitors of their own target language use, and they request judgment and correction from native speakers of the target language.

10. Good second language learners quickly adjust to the new target language as early as possible.

11. A marked degree of empathy is a major characteristic of successful second language learners. They are sensitive to other people's feelings and have outgoing relationships with people around them.

In order to provide special and differential instruction for students who possess these characteristics, it is necessary to go beyond the "normal" foreign language curricular offerings and course content.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULAR OPTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE GIFTED STUDENT

Introducing foreign language instruction to the student at an earlier age than is generally done in American schools today is certainly one option which would allow the gifted student to become highly proficient in a foreign language. Another option would be to provide for acceleration in the current high school curriculum. Gifted students can usually grasp and comprehend material faster than the average student. However, if accelerated activities or an accelerated track is provided for the student, careful consideration must be made to determine that the student not only comprehends the material passively, but can actively perform using the language both orally and in writing as a communication tool. In considering the special traits of the gifted student, the teacher should try to

identify instructional strategies and activities which will help the gifted student have a more successful and rewarding experience in the foreign language classroom. Below are four areas in which gifted students display specific traits which consequently require specific needs to be satisfied in the foreign language classroom or in a foreign language program for the gifted:[3]

1. Language Traits: highly verbal, advanced vocabulary; reads several years above grade level; superior communication skills; ability to manipulate language creatively

   Needs: discussion with intellectual peers - Opportunity should be given for these students to work with and to interact with other high ability students. Special joint projects could be designed to make this possible.
   appropriate reading materials - A real effort should be made, especially at the beginning levels, to provide reading materials that will appeal to them especially in terms of the content. Although the skill level may need to be low at the beginning levels the content should be such that it appeals to their level of interest.
   creative writing - Highly controlled fill-in-the-blank writing exercises should be kept to a minimum for the gifted student. More emphasis should be put on "open-ended," free expression, communicative-type exercises. Rote drilling in writing may be necessary but should not be imposed to the same extent as may be necessary for the average student.
   strengthening of research skills - Opportunity should be given to do independent research projects, especially in the area of culture.

2. Conceptualization Traits: keen insight into cause and effect relationships; highly observant, rapid mastery of the easy recall of facts; creative manipulation of symbols.

   Needs: divergent open-ended teaching strategies - The gifted student should be allowed to explore and go beyond the confines of specific content as outlined in a unit, chapter or lesson. Allowance should be made for him to explore and to question to satisfy the inquisitiveness he/she may display.

minimal use of rote drill - The emphasis on pattern drilling, dialogue memorization and similar instructional strategies should be minimized. More emphasis should be put upon communicative exercises, such as gaming, simulation, role playing, etc. The gifted child will tend not to accept the need for rote drill and memorization, but instead will want to know the "rules" and the rationale for certain language grammar points and structure.

atmosphere of valuing uniqueness - Allowance should be made in the foreign language classroom for the gifted child to be rewarded and given special recognition for his/her unique abilities and accomplishments. Putting the child into leadership roles such as in group activities may be appropriate. Allowing the child to be involved in peer tutoring and other activities of this type will give him/her support and encouragement to attain his/her potential.

self directed discovery - Flexibility in classroom management and daily activities should allow for the gifted child in the foreign language classroom to explore and go beyond the "standard content of the course." Special projects for independent study or group work with intellectual peers could facilitate the gifted child's need to pursue his own interests for enrichment and self-directed discovery.

3. Socialization Traits: outgoing and friendly; assumes leadership roles; well developed sense of humor; openness to others

Needs: opportunities to assume various roles in group interaction - It should be emphasized that the gifted child should be given the opportunity to function in a variety of roles in group work. Leadership roles may be important, but for some gifted students may not be appropriate or meet their specific needs. It is the responsibility of the teacher to identify the specific roles in which the gifted child will function the best and will contribute the most to the group activity.

increased exposure to people of varied backgrounds - The opportunity for exposure to people such as native speakers and other representatives of the foreign culture should be promoted in the foreign language classroom especially for the gifted student.

provisions for understanding self and heightened sensitivity to others - The gifted child in the foreign language classroom should be rewarded for his/her special abilities and given opportunity to pursue his/her special interests.

acceptance of noncomformity - In the foreign language classroom as well as in any other classroom, the teacher should be aware of "unusual" behavior traits that a gifted child may display. An effort should be made to accept these traits of nonconformity especially in the area of socialization where the gifted child may find it difficult to gain acceptance with his/her chronological peers.

4. Productivity Traits: high physical and intellectual level; self-motivated to learn; high standards and goals; prolonged attention span

   Needs: varied and individual opportunities and physical and intellectual needs in learning activities - Opportunity should be given the gifted student to be involved in activities such as writing and producing plays, A-V materials, games, etc.
   sharpening of technical skills, research and communication skills - Special projects for the gifted child should be provided where he/she can pursue his/her interests in order to develop their skills in research and other areas beyond that of the "average student."

CONCLUSION

Foreign language education for the gifted and talented student should be a major component of today's American school curriculum. The linguistically talented student should be encouraged to begin the study of a foreign language at an early age and should also be encouraged to begin studying a second foreign language after achieving a degree of proficiency in the first. Schools and school systems should be encouraged to provide for the gifted student, language offerings other than the traditional three western European languages: French, German and Spanish.

Experience for the gifted children in foreign language learning should enhance their "potential for original thinking and for finding multiple and alternative solutions to problems."[4] Woodruff elaborates on this by stating:

> This implies flexibility and adaptability; a growing ability to cope with the rapid change so characteristic of today's world, and understanding of the development of languages and communication, a capacity to "hear" others, a tendency to enhance fewer stereotypes, a chance to "walk that mile in other shoes." A fact startling to or unknown by Americans is that ninety percent of the world's population speaks languages other than English and lives in different cultural environments.[5]

All students and especially the gifted must be allowed to develop their knowledge and awareness beyond the monolingual limitations of our society.

NOTES

1. Strength through Wisdom, A Report to the President from the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies (November, 1979).

2. Fannetta N. Gordon, Foreign Languages for the Gifted and Talented, Pennsylvania Department of Education (undated).

3. Walter H. Bartz, The Role of Foreign Languages in Gifted Education, Indiana Department of Public Instruction (undated).

4. Melba D. Woodruff, et al, Foreign Language Arts: Process and Content, The Ohio State University, Copyright 1977. (Mimeo)

5. Ibid.

APPENDIX

The following attachment is taken from programs submitted as a result of a survey that was done in preparation for the issuing of this position paper. The goal is to provide the reader with a few references as a "starting place" when looking for foreign language programs aimed at the gifted and talented student.

National Council of State
Supervisors of Foreign Languages

Contact: Mrs. Jane J. Baskerville

Address: Chesterfield County Public Schools
Chesterfield, VA 23832

Description: Beginning in the second year of language study, eligible students may opt for honors prescriptions in lieu of the regular curriculum. Honors prescriptions are designed to develop the individual student's creativity and talent(s) and develop higher level thinking skills within the realm of his linguistic experience. Acceleration is the main prescription only in the second year of language study. Sample honors prescriptions may be reviewed for each language in its Honors Prescriptions Guide.

Contact: Caro H. Feagin

Address: The Governor's Honors Program (a summer program) (GHP)
Caro H. Feagin
Georgia Department of Education
203 Education Annex
156 Trinity Avenue, SW
Atlanta, GA 30303

Description: GHP is a six-week summer instructional program designed to provide intellectually gifted and artistically talented students (10th and 11th grades) challenging and enriching educational opportunities not usually available during the regular school year. A program is offered in Spanish, French, German to approximately 15 students in each language. Students spend approximately 4 hours, per day, in language classes; objectives are centered around communicative competence, culture and personalization of language. Stress is on creativity and individualized progress. Funds for tuition, room, board and instructional supplies are appropriated each year by the Georgia General Assembly.

Contact: Rita Sheridan

Address: Indianapolis Public Schools
120 East Walnut Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204

Description: A gifted program entitled "Enriched Program" for fourth, fifth and sixth grades. Students are placed on to the program based on test scores, teacher recommendation, parent advocacy and I.Q. scores. Foreign language instruction is a major component of the program. Students receive instruction in French, German, or Spanish 35 minutes per day. After sixth grade, students are placed into Level II of a high school program. Emphasis in instruction is on oral skills.

Contact: Gail Hanninen

Address: Kalispell Elementary School
4th Ave. & 7th Street E.
Kalispell, Montana 59901

Description: The Gifted and Talented program in Kalispell offers foreign language as a non-credit enrichment activity. Instruction is provided during a study hall by a community volunteer "mentor" who is a qualified language teacher. Spanish is offered in grades 5 and 6. (Spanish is available in junior and senior high programs also).

Contact: Helena Anderson, Albin Kaczmarek

Address: Meir School
1542 N. 4th St.
Milwaukee, Wis. 53212

Description: This is a magnet school for the gifted and talented that is named after Golda Meir who attended there. The school has a partial immersion component in which various subject matter is taught in French.

Contact: Ms. Lorenne Gurley, Coordinator, Gifted and Talented Program

Address: Wichita Unified School District #259
640 North Emporia
Wichita, Kansas

Description: Spanish instruction given to approximately 600 students, K-6 in 14 centers (buildings) each of which may draw from about 5 elementary schools. Teachers are certified for the elementary level and as teachers of the gifted. All have experience in the Spanish language. Exchange program in operation with a sister city in Mexico in June of each year.

Contact: Dr. Donald R. Greenham

Address: Canton City Schools
800 Market Avenue North
Canton, OH 44702

Description: The CHAP (Canton High Ability Program) operates in grades four through nine. Students are selected city-wide and attend a single elementary school through grade six. The program continues in one of four junior high schools. Essentially, the students have a head start in several academic areas, and one of them is French. The early training allows seniors in high school to elect French V and gives them a very good background in French language and literature for college years. The students read an impressive bibliography in French IV and V and have the equivalent of the college introduction to literature at the end of French V. This ambitious program has been available to capable Canton students since the late 1950's. The first graduates in the program graduated from high school in 1964; the first to have benefitted from the accelerated French program graduated in 1966.

Contact: Karen Davidson

Address: Maryland State Department of Education Summer Program for
Intellectually Gifted Students
200 W. Baltimore St.
Baltimore, MD 21201

Description: Summer sessions, total immersion type, of two weeks' duration in French, German and Spanish for students in grades 10-12. This past summer, however, a combined program (German and computer sciences) was offered for gifted students at the junior and middle school levels.

The program is offered in a college campus setting. It is a live-in program for two weeks. Students are immersed in the language for 4-5 hours per day.

As part of the program all students choose an elective. This past summer, classical Greek was offered to all students at the center. About 17 students chose to take classical Greek as an elective.

Contact: Mario Fienos

Address: Cortez High School
8828 North 31st Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85021

Contact: Carol Viergillo

Address: Mc Clintock High School
1830 East Del Rio
Tempe, AZ 85282

Description: Because of local autonomy school districts set their own curriculum. I would suggest that the above School Districts be contacted for program description.

Contact: Sandra Warren

Address: Corpus Christi ISD
Box 110
Corpus Christi, TX 78403

Description: A Spanish-As-A-Second-Language component of the Gifted/Talented Athena Program at Windsor Park Elementary School. This program involves grades 1-6.

Contact: Annette Lowry

Address: Fort Worth ISD
3210 West Lancaster
Fort Worth, TX 76107

Description: This second language program in grades 4 and 5 involves the teaching of French and Spanish in 25 Magnet/Vanguard schools. There is also an experimental Latin program in one school.